

**BOOK REVIEW**

**Shaylyn Marks**

*California State University, Bakersfield*

*“These Kids are Out of Control:” Why We Must Reimagine “Classroom Management” for Equity*

H. Richard Milner IV, Heather B. Cunningham, Lori Delale-O’Connor, Erika Gold Kestenberg

Publisher: Corwin

Pages: 186

Price: \$31.95

ISBN: 978-1483374802

Citation:

Milner, H. R., Cunningham, H. B., Delale-O’Connor, L., & Kestenberg, E. G. (2019). *“These kids are out of control” Why we must reimagine “Classroom Management” for Equity*. Corwin, A SAGE Publishing Company

**AUTHOR NOTE**

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Shaylyn Marks, California State University, Bakersfield, CA 93311. Email: smarks2@csu.edu.

---

As student populations continue to diversify at an exponential rate, issues of cultural dissonance between students and their teachers become increasingly problematic in American schools. Despite the growing diversity of student populations, teacher demographics have remained stagnant (Milner et al., 2019). The cultural disconnect between teachers and students have been cited as a major source of conflict in classroom spaces (Irvine, 2003). As such, “conflicts are often couched in misinterpretations that seem to be shaped by the socioeconomic, cultural, racial, and ethnic inconsistencies that may exist between teachers and students” (Milner et al., 2019). Conflicts such as these fuel the cultural dissonance present in many classrooms across America, leading to inequitable classroom management practices that disproportionately identify historically minoritized students. Research demonstrates that inequities exist and are embedded in

traditional classroom management practices, and that these practices consistently and disproportionately identify and work against students of color (Milner, 2019; Robbins, 2021; Muhammad, 2020). Recent research identifies detrimental emerging patterns of disproportionate office referrals and high probability of subjective infractions as well as disproportionate suspension and expulsion rates for students of color when compared to their white peers, highlighting inequitable undercurrents within traditional classroom management practices (Milner et al., 2019, Boutte, et al., 2021). While schools are designed to be pipelines for opportunity, they have been reduced to pipelines to prison for many historically marginalized groups of students. In fact, instead of attending college, Black males are five times more likely to go to prison (Howard, 2016). With consistent data identifying a plethora of social justice issues embedded within traditional classroom management practices, we must critically analyze and scrutinize classroom management practices with an equity-centered lens (Milner, 2019). That said, we must disrupt these patterns of inequities that are embedded in traditional systems of classroom management practices.

In traditional classroom spaces, Black students are more likely to be disciplined for subjective violations of classroom rules, such as dress code violations and disrespect, as opposed to their White peers, who when disciplined, are disciplined for objective violations (Milner et al., 2019). Unfortunately, all too often, the resultant of violating these rules is the removal of students from the learning environment, stripping them from the very opportunities schools are designed to provide. To combat these patterns of discipline, educators need to recognize that “Creating such spaces of learning, where students are able to build their learning identities, means that educators understand (a) punishment referral patterns, (b) teacher and student congruence and dissonance, and (c) institutional and systemic barriers” (Milner et al., 2019). It is important to note that the language of punishment is intentionally used to illustrate the contrast between discipline and punishment. Punishment-based practices are harmful rather than helpful. In traditional classroom management systems, punishment in the form of removal from learning spaces is a widespread practice that causes harm rather than an opportunity to learn from mistakes. Additionally, punishment referrals are often the consequence of students failing to comply with rules they are simply asked to blindly adhere to, reinforcing the element of control in traditional classroom management practices. When looking at the similarities between punishment referrals within school systems and punishment patterns in society at large, there is a striking resemblance of “prison-like” consequences for students in that they resort to exclusionary practices in an attempt to control behavior (Milner et al., 2019).

Unfortunately, Black students are most often adversely affected by these traditional policies and consequences. Most punishment referrals that originate in the classroom are grounded in subjective interpretation and disproportionately affect Black students as well as students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (Milner et al., 2019). The consequence of punishment referrals that originate in the classroom and result in the removal of students from learning spaces reduces students’ access and opportunities for learning, adversely affecting student achievement (Milner et al., 2019). When traditional classroom management practices result in the removal of students from learning contexts, students are not only being punished for what educators have deemed

inappropriate or poor behavior but are also stripped away access to the curriculum and the learning environment. Additionally, “too often students are looked upon as the sole problem when teachers actually contribute to conflicts that occur in the classroom; consequently, punishment referrals persist” (Milner et al., 2019). According to Milner (2019), “Because White teachers and students of color possess different racialized and cultural experiences (Milner, 2015), incongruence may serve as a roadblock for academic and social success” (p. 20). While well-intentioned, many White educators adopt color-blind ideologies, claiming to not see color or recognize race, in an effort to create a neutral learning space. Unfortunately, educational spaces are never politically, racially, or otherwise neutral. Treating the classroom as a neutral space ignores the inherent power dynamics present in classroom spaces and ignores the dynamic set of assets students bring to the classroom. As Delpit (1988) states, “to act as if power does not exist is to ensure that the power status quo remains the same” (p. 292). In ignoring the cultural values and racial or ethnic identities of students, educators are missing important dimensions of their students’ identities, which hinders their opportunities to be successful in the classroom (Milner et al., 2019). To effectively engage students, this practice must be eradicated.

Championing the rights of minoritized populations of students, *“These Kids Are Out of Control”* addresses the inequities and disparities embedded in traditional classroom management practices. In an effort to empower Black youth and begin to close the discipline gap that currently exists between Black youth and their white peers, the authors argue for educators to critically examine and reframe the management practices used in traditional classroom spaces, stating, “Understanding classroom management in context must be coupled with clear links to issues of justice, equity, inclusion, and diversity” (Milner et al., 2019, p. 11). To effectively engage in this work, educators need to have the space to shape ideologies and develop their agency by interrogating and disrupting anti-Black policies and practices that have plagued schools since their inception (Marks, S. & Sandals, D., 2021, p.1). *“These Kids Are Out of Control”* is a necessary text and resource to allow educators a starting point in engaging in these critical self-reflective practices.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

*“These Kids Are Out of Control:” Why We Must Reimagine “Classroom Management” for Equity* is a necessary and timely addition to the scholarship in classroom management practices. This text provides valuable insights, backed by research, to assist educators in how they can “engage in self-reflection about their own power and privilege” as a means to transform their practice (Milner et al., 2019, p. 1). As educators use the text to assist their critical self-reflection, the authors promote practices to facilitate building cultural background knowledge, build upon student and community assets, and co-construct curricula and instructional practices to cultivate a more inclusive and inviting classroom space in response to the “humanity of student needs” (Milner et al., 2019, p. 4). Offering both the theoretical and pedagogical principles, *“These Kids Are Out of Control”* directly tackles issues of equity as they pertain to classroom management practices. The book starts with a strong rationale for culturally responsive classroom management practices, citing staggering

statistics in regards to discipline, referrals, and punishments for Black youth in comparison to their White peers. As such, the remainder of the text outlines effective practices and strategies to implement in classroom spaces, supporting educators on their journey of critical self-reflection.

As a standalone text, this book is a necessary resource for educators and teacher education preparation program courses. “*These Kids Are Out of Control*” provides compelling arguments, backed by substantial research and evidence, to reimagine classroom management practices and policies. Offering insightful pedagogical practices to begin dismantling the status quo, the authors provide a compelling argument for culturally responsive classroom management practices. For those looking for additional resources to better understand the complexities of inequities embedded in classroom management practices, I recommend *Lost at School* and *Teaching for Black Lives*. While *Lost at School* offers a series of vignettes with commentary from the author on how to disrupt harmful classroom practices to empower students, while *Teaching for Black Lives* offers more insight into how to specifically support and empower Black students in classroom spaces. The three together offer valuable insights, pedagogical strategies, and questions for critical self-reflection.

**REFERENCES**

- Boutte, G. S., King, J. E., Johnson, G. L., & King, L. J. (Eds.). (2021). *We be lovin' Black children: Learning to be literate about the African diaspora*. Stylus Publishing, LLC.
- Delpit, L. (1988). The silenced dialogue: Power and pedagogy in educating other people's children. *Harvard educational review*, 58(3), 280-299
- Howard, T. C. (2016). Why Black lives (and minds) matter: Race, freedom schools & the quest for educational equity. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 85(2), 101-113. <https://doi-org/10.7709/jnegroeducation.85.2.0101>
- Irvine, J.J., (2003). *Educating teachers for diversity: Seeing with a cultural eye*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Marks, S., Sandles, D. (2021). Book Review. *Journal of Leadership, Equity, and Research*, 7(3). Retrieved from <http://journals.sfu.ca/cvj/index.php/cvj/article/view/175>.
- Milner, H. R. (2015). *Racĕing to class: Confronting poverty and race in schools and classrooms*. Cambring, MA: Harvard Education Press.
- Milner, H. R., Cunningham, H. B., Delale-O'Connor, L., & Kestenberg, E. G. (2019). "These kids are out of control" *Why we must reimagine "Classroom Management" for Equity*. Corwin, A SAGE Publishing Company
- Muhammad, G. (2020). *Cultivating genius: An equity framework for culturally and historically responsive literacy*. Scholastic Incorporated
- Robbins, Z. (2021). *Restorative Justice Tribunal: And Ways to Derail Jim Crow Discipline in Schools*. Routledge.